



Michael S. Greco
President

AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION

321 N. Clark Street
Chicago, Illinois 60610-4714
(312) 988-5109
FAX: (312) 988-5100

July 5, 2006

Honorable Álvaro Uribe Vélez
President, Republic of Colombia
Palacio de Nariño
Carrera 8 No.7-26
Bogotá, Colombia

Dear President Uribe:

The American Bar Association (ABA), established in 1879, is the world's largest voluntary legal organization, with more than 410,000 members of the legal community in the United States and around the world. On behalf of the Association, I write to congratulate you upon your recent reelection and to urge that you use the opportunity created by this new mandate to promote international rule of law principles applicable to lawyers in Colombia.

The ABA has a longstanding commitment to the preservation of the rule of law throughout the world. In 1975, the ABA adopted a resolution calling for support of the rule of law internationally and emphasizing the need to assure the independence of lawyers and judges worldwide in order to maintain internationally recognized standards of fairness and justice.

As a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) since 1976, Colombia officially recognizes the ICCPR principle that the independence of lawyers to represent their clients is fundamental to maintaining the international norms of equal justice and due process. Only a legal system that respects the integrity and guards the security of judges, lawyers, and human rights advocates can help ensure the realization of these standards in its own country.

In addition, as a member of the United Nations, Colombia undoubtedly is aware of the United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers. These principles require governments to ensure that lawyers are able to perform their professional functions without intimidation, harassment, or improper interference. The principles specifically call upon governments to provide adequate safeguards for the security of lawyers threatened as a result of discharging their functions as lawyers. In addition, these principles require that lawyers not be identified with their clients or their clients' causes as a result of discharging their responsibilities to their clients.

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The ABA therefore is extremely concerned that, despite Colombia's commitment to these international principles and the existence of a legal framework designed to protect the work of lawyers in Colombia, lawyers in Colombia have been threatened and, in a number of instances, assassinated, merely for carrying out their professional obligations. We trust that you, as someone also trained in the law, share in this concern.

Of immediate interest to the ABA are the reported threats to lawyers in Colombia who work with the Lawyers' Collective "Jose Alvear Restrepo" ("Lawyers' Collective") in its efforts to promote human rights and the rule of law in Colombia. In April of this year, Soraya Gutiérrez Arguello received the ABA Section of International Law's International Human Rights Lawyer Award in recognition of her critically important human rights work with the Lawyers' Collective in Colombia. The ABA therefore was alarmed to learn that the Lawyers' Collective, and Soraya Gutierrez particularly, have been receiving threatening e-mails since the award was given.

One of the messages, received in May, warns that paramilitary organizations are still intact and operating throughout Colombia and that the Lawyers' Collective will "suffer the full weight of [their] presence" unless it ends its human rights work and takes up the paramilitaries' cause. Although your government has committed to demobilizing paramilitary organizations, their continued activity against human rights advocates, along with the claim in the e-mail message that they maintain "good" relations with Colombia's armed forces, is especially troubling. The message appears in fact to reinforce findings of the Organization of American States and the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights that persisting reports of death threats and murders by paramilitary organizations, including "demobilized" paramilitaries, are credible.

The ABA is sensitive to the tremendous challenges that your government and your citizens have had to confront in recent years. The ABA further recognizes that Colombia has made considerable progress in addressing many of these challenges. But, like the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United States government, and many respected human rights organizations, the ABA is compelled to speak when, despite the steps taken by your government to date, serious human rights abuses and violations of rule of law principles affecting lawyers and human rights workers in Colombia continue.

The ABA urges you to use your good office as President—and as a colleague in the law—to undertake special efforts that will underscore the legitimacy of lawyers' human rights work and that will enable lawyers to carry out their professional obligations in safety, regardless of whom they represent. As part of those efforts, the ABA encourages you to consider, in accordance with the February 2003 recommendation by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights "to take disciplinary action against any State employees who through their actions or omissions in any way jeopardize the work of human rights defenders."

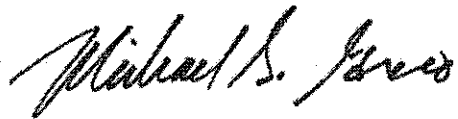
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Through its members and various components, including its Center for Human Rights, the American Bar Association will maintain its interest in rule of law developments and the work of lawyers carrying out their professional obligations in Colombia. Your consideration of this letter and the actions that are requested is appreciated.

Sincerely,



Michael S. Greco

President

American Bar Association

cc: Honorable Francisco Santos, Vice President
Honorable Sabas Pretelt de la Vega, Minister of Interior and Justice
Honorable Mario Iguarán, Attorney General
Honorable Andres Pastrana, Colombian Ambassador to the United States,
Honorable Condoleezza Rice, U.S. Secretary of State
Honorable Paula J. Dobriansky, Under Secretary for Democracy
and Global Affairs
Honorable Thomas A. Shannon, Assistant Secretary of State for
Western Hemisphere Affairs
Honorable William Wood, U.S. Ambassador to Colombia
Ms. Nan Fife, U.S. Department of State, Colombia Desk Officer